

Reviews

The Editors are pleased to receive notice of books written or edited by educationists in Wales, or with Welsh connections, or with a Welsh educational interest.

Sally Tomlinson, *Education in a Post-Welfare Society* (Open University Press, 2001), 201pp. £16.99, ISBN 0-335-20288-8 (pb); £50.00, ISBN 0-335-20289-6 (hb).

Amanda Coffey, *Education and Social Change* (Open University Press, 2001), 142pp. £15.99, ISBN 0-335-20068-0 (pb); £50.00, ISBN 0-335-20069-9 (hb).

Both these lively and accessible books take as their broad subject the transformation of education in England and Wales (and, to some extent, Scotland) in recent decades. Both contain valuable insights, and both provide the reader with excellent and thought-provoking material for understanding the subtle and often complex relationship between the state and educational reform.

Sally Tomlinson's book is dedicated to Fred Jarvis, the indefatigable General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers from 1975 to 1989. Professor Tomlinson was, in fact, one of a group of fourteen leading university professors of education and allied disciplines who, with the support of Fred Jarvis, wrote a letter to the *Guardian* newspaper just before the April 1992 general election declaring that a modern democratic

society could not prosper with a narrow education base and socially divisive hierarchies of schools, that government should treat education as a public service and not as a commodity to be traded in the marketplace and that 'high quality' education should not be restricted to an elite group of children in a privileged minority of schools. This was followed up by the publication of a so-called 'alternative White Paper', *Education: A Different Vision*, edited by Fred Jarvis and Professor Ted Wragg for the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR). The fourteen professors, and countless others with a commitment to state education, were naturally disappointed when the incoming Conservative government moved even further to create diversity and specialization within the education system and to subject schools, particularly secondary schools, to the operation of market forces. There was even greater disappointment when a Labour government, elected with a huge majority in May 1997, opted to retain the market principles of choice and competition between schools.

We have clearly moved a long way from the prevailing ethos of the period following the end of the Second World

War when it was firmly believed by the leading figures in all the main political parties that the state had a major (probably the major) role to play in the provision of decent public services. As Professor Tomlinson observes, the 1944 Education Act, the 1946 National Insurance Act and the 1948 National Health Service Act can be regarded as 'the three pillars of the post-war Welfare State'. What became known as 'Butskellism' (a combination of the names of the Conservative politician R. A. Butler and the Labour leader Hugh Gaitskell) even survived the early controversies surrounding the reorganization of secondary education along comprehensive lines; and there is a case for arguing that in the 1950s and early 1960s, education policy at a national level was becoming increasingly 'non-partisan' and, during Sir Edward Boyle's time as Conservative Minister of Education from 1962 to 1964, almost 'bi-partisan'.

Today's Labour government has a very different view of the administration of education and welfare; and although the concept of 'consensus politics' has returned to determine the structure of the national debate, it is not the same consensus that underpinned the optimistic thinking of the post-war period. The so-called 'Third Way' in politics claims to promote a measure of social justice, but it aims to unite this with programmes of 'modernization' which involve individual liberalism, the accelerating privatization of public services and the subservience of educational ends to economic priorities. Professor Tomlinson argues convincingly that 'education has moved from being a key pillar of the Welfare

State to being a prop for a global market economy'.

Chapter 8 of *Education in a Post-Welfare Society* looks at equity issues, concentrating particularly on race, gender and the concept of 'failing' boys; and such issues constitute a major concern of Amanda Coffey's book, which, of the two, is the more influenced by recent sociological research in general and by studies of race, gender, sexuality and 'identity' in particular. It is a recurring theme of *Education and Social Change* that while state education has undergone remarkable transformations throughout the 1980s and 1990s, there has been a good deal of educational continuity in the face of change. While the rhetoric of New Labour sometimes talks in terms of a new beginning in 1997 and emphasizes notions of community, democracy, citizenship and participation, it can be convincingly argued that equality and social justice issues have actually remained at the periphery of contemporary educational priorities. At the same time, it is Amanda Coffey's view that while there is now much that is new – curricula, markets, assessment and inspection procedures, teacher training guidelines and practices, a new promotional culture and recast educational providers and consumers – there are still, 'gendered teacher careers, everyday experiences of the classroom teacher at the "chalk face", differential educational performances and outcomes, school stratifications, and a range of identities and biographies being crafted and (re)produced with/in educational settings'. So with change comes continuity; and the balance between the

two is, arguably, the major theme running through the eight chapters of the book.

Of these chapters, one of the most original and interesting is that on 'Identities and biographies', and it is clear that this area of research, stressing the importance of educational experiences for the (re)production of collective and individual biographies holds a special interest for the author. The complex relationship between society and the self has indeed become an increasingly important focus of contemporary sociology, leading to what has been called the 'biographical turn' within sociological inquiry and writing. Amanda Coffey provides the reader with a scholarly and readable introduction to the ways in which 'self-identity' is *constructed through* and, in turn, *constructs* the processes of social life.

Many researchers have observed that there are few things more difficult than trying to make sense of contemporary political and social events and of the direction in which things are moving. The confident judgements and assertions one is tempted to make can easily be nullified by unforeseen happenings. That being said, both these volumes are to be highly recommended for their success in understanding contemporary educational transformations and in relating these to the wider processes of social, political and cultural change.

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Stephen Gorard, *Quantitative Methods in Educational Research: The Role of Numbers Made Easy* (London and New York, Continuum, 2001), 200pp. £55.00, ISBN 0-8264-5306-6 (hb); £16.99, ISBN 0-8264-5307-4 (pb).

Given the difficulties many students have in understanding and carrying out 'quantitative' research, attempts to explain the underlying principles of the approach – especially by writers active in the field – are always welcome. It is also true, as Gorard notes, that many 'qualitative' researchers actually make quantitative claims without taking seriously what such claims involve. This wide-ranging book, with an intended audience of students studying educational research methods, covers sampling, surveys, experiments, the use of secondary data, data analysis and statistics, as well as providing some illustrative discussion of the use of indices. The discussion largely eschews the use of formulae, algebra and mathematical proof, preferring instead to offer informal accounts supported by examples. This is both a strength and a weakness. Certainly, this approach might cause less initial anxiety to students with a fear of mathematics. On the other hand, I suspect that some readers, in trying to follow the arguments, will struggle to make sense of some content.

The book's discussion of the standard error of the mean illustrates the problem. An attentive reader will want to know *why* 'sampling theory suggests' that sample means will be normally distributed, and may also wonder *why* standard error in this context is derived from the standard deviation of the sample by supporting

argument. An informal one (or a simple simulation?), drawing attention to some reasons why we would expect a reduced variance in a sample of means, might help. The book then discusses the relation between sample size and standard error, including a useful graph showing how standard error diminishes as sample size is increased. The student who has managed to follow the argument to this point now has to struggle with an unannounced change of scale, since the graph, unlike the preceding discussion, appears to use standardized scores (which have not been introduced). The introduction of standard deviation itself might also cause the attentive student difficulties. It is said, in passing, that deviations are squared ('to eliminate negative values') without an explanation of why simply removing the negative signs is not used to achieve this.

The main strength of the book is its critical discussion of real examples to explain common pitfalls in research design and analysis of data. If students succeed in transferring the understanding derivable from it to their own work, they should be less likely to reproduce the errors and fallacies highlighted by Gorard. Nevertheless, there are a few places where I would have liked to have seen the critical approach taken further. For example, the discussion of weighting (pp. 30–1) notes that, if we wish to generalize from a stratified sample to a population, but have a biased sample, then we must weight our responses to reflect the nature of the relevant groups in the population. The example concerns answers to a 'yes/no' item from rural and urban participants. After weighting, the best estimate of the population figure moves from 44 per

cent 'yes' to 52 per cent 'yes'. The opportunity might have been taken here to note that this 52 per cent figure tells us much less than the underlying figures of 60 per cent and 20 per cent respectively for the urban and rural populations. The general issue of the *sense* of population figures deserves more attention in a book which has the development of critical powers as part of its agenda. It would also have been useful to have had some discussion, in the section on meta-analysis, of the underlying assumptions about human nature and cultural differences that underpin the aggregation of results across time and place. A similar point arises on page 171 where a regression equation derived from English data is used illustratively to predict scores for a Welsh authority. A more explicit discussion of the assumptions involved in such practices would have been welcome.

This review may seem critical, but is intended in the spirit of the book itself. In spite of the issues mentioned above, this is a very useful volume in an area many find difficult. Used in conjunction with a more standard introduction to statistical reasoning, and a fuller account of the logic of research design, and in the context of a course where the lecturer can fill in some of the leaps in the sketched explanations, it certainly should help to reduce the worrying errors made by beginning and established researchers in designing research and interpreting data. It is especially clear and helpful on the importance of considering research goals, design, data collection and analysis together. Given the poor quality of much published research – depressingly well illustrated throughout – this book

deserves to be added to the reading list for all those studying research methods in education. It would also be useful for research methods courses in social science more generally. However, I doubt that many student readers would agree that numbers have become as easy as the subtitle suggests.

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Iolo Wyn Williams (gol.), *Gorau Arf: Hanes Sefydli Ysgolion Cymraeg 1939–2000* (Y Lolfa, 2002), 351pp. £19.95, ISBN 0–86243–617–6 (hb).

(A history of the establishment of Welsh-medium schools 1939–2000, edited by Iolo Wyn Williams.)

The growth of Welsh-medium schools, arguably one of the most notable educational developments of twentieth-century Britain, has not yet been chronicled, let alone analysed, despite the fact that the 'movement' celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in 1999. The year 1949 was chosen as a starting date since ten schools were then in existence, seven having opened in that year. This book starts ten years earlier with the history of the first 'designated' Welsh school, established under the auspices of Urdd Gobaith Cymru in Aberystwyth – although one could argue that a school established in Llanwenarth, Monmouthshire by the Abergavenny Cymreigyddion Society in

1837 was really the first!

Initiated by RHAG, the association for parents of pupils in Welsh-medium schools, it is a collection of essays by individuals actively involved either as parents, teachers, officials of RHAG and its precursor, Undeb Rhieni Ysgolion Cymraeg, or LEA officials (including several former directors of education). Some chapters are published post-humously, while several incorporate the recollections of some of the early pioneers. Its intention is to record the history of the first half-century before memories are lost, and in this respect, it fulfils its aim, providing a useful chronological framework, some statistical tables and detailed first-hand material from a variety of perspectives which will undoubtedly prove useful for future researchers, although the absence of an index is a disadvantage.

The editor has opted for a county-by-county approach; and because of the administrative changes in 1974 and 1996 this causes some repetition and one or two minor inconsistencies in the text. However, the structure is logical and helps accentuate the way in which the history reflects the social and linguistic differences between the various regions of Wales. For example, the first substantial expansion took place in the south-east and north-east where the younger generation had already almost lost the language by the 1950s, while development was slower and different in nature in the north and west where Welsh was stronger. Political differences are also in evidence for, while a director of education and council in support of bilingual education could move quickly,

the opposite was often the case, and the establishment of schools was held up for many years in some areas, despite parental pressure. Although the main impetus came from parents taking advantage of the 1944 Education Act's provision that their wishes should be honoured, in some counties it was the authorities which took the lead, as in Flintshire in the 1950s and Gwynedd in the 1980s.

The title, 'Gorau Arf' (from the proverb and school motto 'Gorau arf, arf dysg') reflects the way in which the contributors almost invariably portray the story in terms of a 'battle' or 'struggle', first to establish and later improve provision in Welsh. Initially, Welsh schools were founded to defend the Welsh language and culture and to provide the most appropriate (culturally relevant) type of education for Welsh-speaking children in their mother tongue. The first of these motives continued when, from the 1950s and 1960s, schools began to accept pupils whose home language was not Welsh – often opposing county policy. It was later, as young children's facility to acquire fluency in two languages became clear and the notion of bilingual education became more acceptable, that the educational value of Welsh schools for all children in Wales was emphasized. The phenomenal growth of Welsh-medium schools in the south-east would not have been possible had English-speaking parents not been interested in them.

The book recounts many episodes of active protest by parents. Some, such as the campaign against Mid Glamorgan's policy of establishing Welsh 'units' rather

than separate schools in the 1980s involved Welsh-speaking (professional) incomers to the valleys 'fighting' alongside locally born English-speaking parents in a genuine alliance. Not all campaigns were as bitter, but a sense of continuous, long-term struggle pervades the book; parents requested, lobbied and protested to increase and improve provision, and authorities strove to respond to unanticipated demand. It is a story of constant upheaval and interminable moves to (usually) inadequate and inappropriate premises – from chapel vestries and community halls to disused churches, military camps and old (previously vacated) schools. Purpose-built Welsh schools are a recent development – though some parents built their own extensions. Many relocations involved sharing a school site, and there are several examples of the (understandable) animosity which this created in local community schools when the Welsh 'side' eventually took over the original building, though the antagonism rarely extended to pupils. The volume confirms that the tremendous effort which was entailed in securing a bilingual system of education in Wales often involved controversy and conflict. However, the lines of battle were not as clearly drawn as some would have it, for there were parents and councillors (Labour and other parties), Welsh and English speakers (middle and working class) in both camps.

The struggle was also a financial one since equipment and facilities were scarce. Many Welsh schools were originally 'voluntary' schools where parents paid the teacher's salary; others ran their own nursery schools for many years,

involving monetary sacrifice and constant fundraising. The argument that it was a local authority's duty to maintain Welsh schools was won in the 1940s and 1950s, but the contribution of the Tonyrefail businessman Trevor Morgan and his wife, Gwyneth, in establishing the Glyndŵr Fund in 1963 to help children attend Welsh schools and in opening a private school (primary and secondary) in Bridgend in 1968 demonstrates that private initiative was sometimes taken when public funding was seen to be inadequate.

It was also a struggle for acceptance, and, at a time when success was measured in terms of the number of pupils who passed their 11+, Welsh schools needed to prove to the local community and to inspectors that academic standards were high, particularly in English. Schools had to develop suitable teaching materials in Welsh; and the creation of new terminology, the adoption of progressive teaching methods and initiatives such as inter-phase liaison, was pioneered by many of these schools despite the limited resources.

The tone of the book is celebratory, and Professor Williams's foreword asserts the educational benefits of a Welsh-medium education. Although he leaves open the question of the extent to which these schools will contribute to the survival of the language in the future, it is clear that they are still expected to do so. Occasionally, as in Gwilym Humphries's chapter on Ysgol Gyfun Rhydfele, it is recognized that a small minority was disillusioned by the Welsh-medium sector, while Meurig Royles's memoir of his first encounter with RHAG's central

committee in the 1980s suggests that mass parental support was not always forthcoming. The chapter by the former deputy director of Powys Education Authority seemingly implies a smoother development than was actually the case in that county.

This book (and its photographs) might well evoke an emotional response in those who invested their time, money and energy establishing and teaching in Welsh-medium schools. From the point of view of the history of education in Wales, it highlights the impressive (and unexpected) scale of expansion of the sector and increases our understanding of the similarities and differences in bilingual education in Wales as a whole, the complexities involved and of changes over time. It also underlines how much more there is still to be written in order fully and critically to analyse a momentous – if contentious – educational and linguistic experiment. It is hoped that an English version of the book will be forthcoming.

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